

# Preliminary Report of Archaeological Excavations at Maṭkanai (Malakand)

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**Abstract:** To curtail clandestine activities of illegal diggers, the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar (hereafter the Department), planned a preemptive strategy for rescuing and preserving Buddhist cultural heritage by rigorous archaeological excavations in ancient Oḍḍiyāna (also Uḍḍiyāna) and Gandhāra, i.e., respectively the present Malakand Division and the Peshawar Valley of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. In the Initial phase, the sites of Maṭkanai and Baghrajai were excavated during 1980. A little later (1981-82), the Gandhara Archaeological Project (GAP) was launched for the same purpose. The project continued till early 1990s, during which time a number of sites, such as, Charg Paṭē in the Dir District and Butkara-III, Gilbān Sērai, Gumbatkay, Gaṛasa, Loē Baṇṇ, Shanaisha and Tirath in District Swat, while others in the Peshawar Valley were scientifically excavated. Most of them were found ruthlessly plundered long ago, however, the leftover cultural material, mainly sculptures wrought in schist stone were collected from them (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> Study of sculptures from the intact site Butkara-III, and partly Charg Paṭē, Shanaisha and others significantly advanced our knowledge about the genesis and growth of Gandhāra art.<sup>2</sup> The cultural material retrieved is preserved in the Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, University of Peshawar (hereafter University Museum). While that from the sites of Maṭkanai and Baghrajai was mutually shared by the Dir and the University Museums.

This preliminary report of the Buddhist remains at Maṭkanai, in the Ranizai Valley of District Malakand, is the outcome of brief salvage excavation conducted from October 25 to November 15, 1980. It was a joint venture of the Department and the Dir Museum at Chakdara. The fieldwork was directed by Prof. Abdur Rahman and the site was supervised by Prof. Muhammad Farooq Swati (then MA student), while the Dir Museum was represented by the then Director Mr. Aurangzeb Khan. Long after (13 July 2002), when the second co-author and Mr. Muhammad Naeem, surveyor of the Department, visited the site, they found it completely wrecked and levelled for cultivation leaving no apparent signs of identification. While studying the cultural material excavated from the said site for her MPhil studies,<sup>3</sup> the principal author occasionally consulted the excavators, who had already been retired from University service, that ensued in writing this preliminary report.

**Keywords:** Maṭkanai, Malak Paṭē, excavation, sculptures, Buddhist art, University Museum, Dir Museum.

## Introduction

The Swat (ancient Su-ho-to, Subhavastu or Suvastu)<sup>4</sup> Valley rather the entire Malakand Division (ancient Oḍḍiyāna)<sup>5</sup> presents a rich Buddhist cultural heritage. Since 1926 onward, Swat (a princely State by then) was made open to the foreigners for systematic surveys and excavation that are continually carried out by various missions from in and abroad. In the early 1980s, the Department felt the need for discouraging covert activities of illicit diggers and to protect the endangered Buddhist cultural heritage by

extensive digging at potential archaeological sites in the Malakand, Mardan and Peshawar Divisions under the patronage of Prof. Farzand Ali Durrani and field direction of Prof. Abdur Rahman. After exploration, the most vulnerable Malak Paṭē site at Maṭkanai in the Totakān Union Council of Tehsil Swat Ranizai, District Malakand, was selected for excavation (Fig. 2). It is approached through a link road leading from Baṭkhela in the southwest to Kulangai. Short of Totakān, the Buddhist site of Malak Paṭē, lying at the foothills in terraces, is situated about a kilometre to the southeast of

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Maṭkanai Village (Fig. 3).<sup>6</sup> A working spring, locally known as Mār Cheena (meaning serpent's spring)<sup>7</sup>, is situated to the southwest of Malak Paṭē, while in its south there is a seasonal stream, *khwar*, and mountain spurs of Shāṭingo Ghunḍai. Ancient ruins scatter between the *khwar*-and-Shāṭingo Ghunḍai and the foothills in the southeast of the site (Fig. 4).<sup>8</sup> Situated about 643m above the sea level, the site lies approximately between Lat. 34°37'7.80"N and Long. 71°51'22.50"E.<sup>9</sup>

Located on the left bank of the River Swat, the Maṭkanai Village, probably, derived its name from the local Pashtu language. The nomenclature of the village is explained differently.<sup>10</sup> The remains are situated in the field of a local chief that is called 'Malak Paṭē' (meaning farm/field of Malak) and the locality of the site is known as 'Malak Bāṇḍa or Paloso Bāṇḍa' (meaning Malak's hamlet; or *paloso* hamlet)<sup>11</sup>.

## Research Statement

Fearing the loss of first-hand information for good, should the excavators publish, at least, a preliminary report of the Maṭkanai site. The excavator decided to begin with digging campaign at this site that revealed signs of its ruthless pillage. Work at Maṭkanai was, therefore, concluded earlier than other sites selected for the purpose of field investigation. Delay in publishing the preliminary report was caused due to certain reasons such as: transfer of the then Director of the Dir Museum, the collaborating party; the antiquity from the site was lying split in the custody of the University and the Dir Museums; simultaneous engagement of the field director Prof. Abdur Rahman in teaching assignments at the Department as well as in exploring and excavating at sites in the stipulated period of the Gandhara Archaeological Project; and fast upcoming retirement of the field director. The principal author, studied artefacts from the same site for her MPhil research.<sup>12</sup> Consulting the excavators for resolving certain issues regarding the excavation and the cultural material excavated from here moved the present authors to publish the long-awaited preliminary report, using field notes and archives lying preserved in the Department.

## Research Methodology

Since the excavated objects from the site form shared property of the Dir and the University Museums, therefore, the principal author sought permission from the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (hereafter DoAM) and the authorities of the University Museum for the purpose of study. Documentary and photographic record was obtained from the concerned institutions. Fieldnotes, site plans, structural and section-drawings in the archives of the Department, and discussion with members of the collaborative teams furnished primary information.

Before studying, cultural objects were cleaned, photographed, measured, documented, and described. The acquired data was then sifted in different functional and thematic groups and sub-groups, i.e., *jātaka* stories, narrative relief-panels depicting life of the Buddha, the Bodhisattva figures, images of the Buddha, devotees, the laity, mythical beings, birds, and animals, as well as architectural elements and miscellaneous objects. All categories were thoroughly examined.

The whole data were analyzed in conformity with notes, drawings and photographs taken in the field. Verifying identification of scenes in the narrative reliefs, the whole corpus of cultural material was studied in view of available literary sources in the form of books, published and unpublished works, relevant catalogues, etc.

## Excavation

The fieldwork was conducted from 25th October to 15th November 1980 with the help of technical and supportive staff from the Department. The late Dawood Kamal made drawings and (the late) Mr. Asad Ali took photographs of the ongoing field activities and antiquities. Mr. Aurangzeb Khan, then the Director of the Dir Museum, arranged for accommodation and boarding of the field staff on the campus of the museum. While the excavation was in progress, visiting local people informed the team that the site has been robbed by illegal diggers in the past. This fact was concealed by the landowner at the time of signing agreement with him.

## Layout of the Trenches

The site had already been brought under cultivation by the landlord, who reported that fragments of sculptures and other artefacts occasionally turned up while ploughing. At the outset, a topographic map of the site was prepared, a datum point fixed to its west, and a baseline extended eastward from the datum point (Fig. 5). An area of 20x20m<sup>2</sup> was selected for excavation, which was further divided into nine trenches each measuring 6x6m<sup>2</sup> leaving one-metre-thick balk between the adjacent trenches, which were marked as F-IV, V, VI; G-IV, V, VI; and H-IV, V, VI (Figs. 6, 7). Starting excavation at trenches F-IV, F-V and G-VI, digging was subsequently extended to all the remaining ones (Fig. 8). The excavation revealed that the site had already been badly robbed long ago, however, some ruined structures were exposed and from the debris discarded defaced sculptures were collected.

## Trench-wise Excavation Details

### i. Trench F-IV

Composed of sand and fallen masonry stones, Layer-1 of Trench F-IV yielded few dressed pieces of schist stone, rare potsherds, and bits of charcoal. Layer-2 was blackish sandy, while Layer-3 was loose brownish soil mixed with masonry stones.

Minor stupas no. 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14 and 15 along with chapels no. 9 and 11 were exposed in this trench. The western face of the base/plinth of chapel no. 9 had four pilasters. All the stupas built in ashlar masonry were square in plan. Having traces of lime plaster, minor stupa no.13 had four pilasters, between which stucco images of the seated Buddha were moulded against red background (Figs. 11, 12).

Fifteen centimetres to the south of minor stupa no. 4, a 45x45cm<sup>2</sup> pedestal was probably the base of a ruined post, as suggested by tubular stones of shaft scattered around.

Finds from this trench included the Buddha head, small broken heads, fragments of seated and standing figures, and a frieze carved with

images of the Buddha and worshippers in the lower register, while human figures under niches in the upper one (Fig. 32).

### ii. Trench F-V

Layer-1 of this trench was sandy brownish clay mixed with fallen masonry stones. Layer-2, blackish sandy mingled with charcoal and pottery fragments, was exposed in the eastern half of the trench. It exclusively yielded medium textured plain rims of storage jars. Here was found a rectangular chapel no. 10 in diaper masonry similar to chapel no. 9, as mentioned above. Facing west, it measured 2.62x2m<sup>2</sup>, while its lime-plastered base was provided with five pilasters at regular intervals (Figs. 13, 14). At the bottom of Layer-2, potsherds became scarce. Layer-3, brownish and compact, yielded nothing. In the eastern half 2.9m below the datum line was exposed Layer-4, brownish natural/virgin soil (Fig. 20). Reaching foundation of chapel no. 10 further digging was discontinued here.

Near the eastern corner of the trench was found a broken carved piece of a square harmika, depicting the birth and death scenes of the Buddha. A broken arched panel with four kneeling princely figures was discovered 10cm to the west from chapel no. 10 and 2.17m below the datum line (Figs. 22, 35).

### iii. Trench F-VI

Below 6cm the topsoil and 32cm below the datum line two walls were exposed in the north-western part of Trench F-VI. Wall no.1, one metre thick, stretched in the north-south direction, while wall no. 2 of the same thickness ran in the east-west direction and joined the eastern end of wall no.1 at right angle. Layer-2, composed of ashes and charcoal, contained a good number of potsherds. As indicated by their poor masonry, both the walls belonged to the last period of the site. Their existing height from the foundation level was 80cm.

Below the foundation of the walls, a small 12x20cm<sup>2</sup> hearth was found at the depth of 1.47m from the datum line. It situated 3.3m

from the western and 5.25m from the southern corners of the trench. Obviously, it was earlier than the two walls just mentioned. In the northwestern part of the trench Layer-3, brownish in colour, was dug down to 1.82m from the datum line. Here walls no. 3, 4, 5 and 6 were exposed, of which the last one stretched in the east-west direction and, probably, belonged to the earliest period of the site. Layer-4, compact and brownish in colour, very rarely contained organic material.

The eastern quadrant of the trench was dug down to Layer-3, which was brownish and mixed with pebbles. Some horizontally laid stone slabs at the depth of 2.02m from the datum line were, probably, used for paving the floor. A large piece of umbrella was found embedded under the foundation of wall no. 3 at the depth of 1.52m from the datum line (Fig. 15). Further digging was stopped in this trench. The findings from here included head of a male statue, a grinding stone, and few potsherds.

#### iv. Trench G-IV

Layer-1 of Trench G-IV was composed of sandy clay and fallen masonry stones. Excavating down to 30cm from the topsoil and 70cm from the datum line a blackish sandy Layer-2 was exposed. Three minor square stupas no. 1, 2, and 3, discovered in the southern and south-western half of the trench, were cleared down to the floor level. Built of stone in ashlar masonry, their bases having traces of lime plaster raised to 89cm from the floor level. Situated 1.61m below the datum line, the floor level was paved with rectangular stone slabs of different sizes, ranging from 17.3cm<sup>2</sup> to 30x70cm<sup>2</sup>. Extending further to the east and west of stupa no. 2, two more minor square stupas no. 5 and 6, respectively 1.2x1.2m<sup>2</sup> and 1.05x1.05m<sup>2</sup> in size were discovered. To the north of minor stupa no.5 and to the south of wall no.1, a broken piece of an umbrella of a large diameter and a 68x68cm<sup>2</sup> base of a column were found (Fig.16). A small trough/pit, 52cm on its north and south, while 38cm and 35cm on its west and east respectively, was

found 31cm to the north of minor stupa no. 2. Three steps — each 1.7m broad, 27cm high and 27cm deep, were exposed on the west of the stupa terrace.

Layer-4 yielded fragments of a defaced head, a broken half of a carved square harmika, damaged head and a statue, a badly damaged stucco head and several carved pieces of stone.

#### v. Trench G-VI

Layer-1 of Trench G-VI mainly consisted of fallen masonry stones. Here one metre-thick wall no.1 in poor diaper masonry exposed 30cm below the datum line stretched in the east-west direction. Probably it belonged to the last period of the site. Some 22cm under wall no.1, a 65cm thick wall no. 2 in fine diaper masonry stretched in the north-south direction. A triangular niche—19cm deep and 19cm on each side, in wall no. 2 was found 78cm down the datum line and 18cm to the north of wall no.1. Largely composed of ashes and charcoal, Layer-2 produced ample potsherds and animal bones.

A small hearth measuring 20x20cm<sup>2</sup> was exposed 1.42m below the datum line in the north-west part of the trench to the east of wall no. 2. It was located at 3.75m from the western and 2m from the northern corner of the trench. Digging was concluded 2.02m down the datum line.

Layer-4, fully burnt, spread all over the trench 1.98m below the datum line. To the east of wall no. 2, a 12cm thick scorched beam was found 2.02m below the datum line. The western end of the beam rested 2.8m, while its eastern end was at a distance 2.2m from the northern corner of the trench.

The southeast part of the trench revealed undressed stones of fallen masonry. Here walls no.3, 4 and 5 were exposed 45cm below the datum line. In the joint corner of walls no. 1 and 5 a cracked storage jar was unearthed 1.12m down the datum line. It was covered with a lid and filled with ashy clay, containing few stone-balls and a broken bowl (Fig. 17).



Plain potsherds, terracotta beads and headless statues of two warriors were among the finds from this trench (Figs. 18, 37, 38).

#### vi. Trench G-V

The northern corner of Trench G-V revealed 37cm below the datum line a 95cm thick wall no. 1 in diaper masonry that ran in the east-west direction. Its eastern end joined wall no.1 of Trench H-V, while its western end extended to Trench G-VI. This part of the trench was dug down to 1.18m from the datum line. A flat round stone 33cm in diameter having burning signs may have been used as a hotplate was found close to the south of wall no.1 some 68cm below the datum line. In the western corner of the trench 52cm below the datum line another wall extended to G-VI.

On removing the balk between them, wall no.4 of G-VI was found westward extension of wall no. 1 of G-V. Layer-2 of G-V was brownish soil containing fallen masonry stones and few potsherds was exposed 1.47m below the datum line.

#### vii. Trench H-VI

Layer-1 of Trench H-VI largely included fallen masonry stones. In the northern corner of the trench 58cm below the datum line was found wall no.1, 65cm thick in fine diaper masonry, laid in the east-west direction. In the eastern corner of the trench 52cm below the datum line was exposed wall no. 2, 95cm thick in fine diaper masonry, oriented north south. Stratigraphically earlier and in fine diaper masonry, it seems that walls no.1 and 2 of H-VI and wall no. 2 of G-VI were contemporary and laid prior to walls no. 1 and 2 of F-VI and wall no.1 of G-VI with degenerated diaper masonry. Layer-2, ashy in composition, contained many fragmentary bones and charcoal. Below 42cm the datum line, wall no. 3 joining wall no. 2 to its west at right angle extended in the east. Its height along with the foundation was 1.05m. Further digging was confined to the north-east part of the trench. Beneath wall no. 3 and at the depth of 1.48m from the datum line, a

thin black ashy horizontally levelled layer suggested a floor level, which obviously was earlier than the wall.

Below 2.38m the datum line, few stone slabs paved small area along wall no.2 in H-VI. Wall no.4 in diaper masonry was found 2.18m below the datum line running parallel to wall no.2 at 30cm. Its northern end was 1.65m from the eastern corner of the trench. Cutting this end at right angle there was another wall, no.5, leading westward. Both walls no.4 and 5 were 69cm thick. Layer-3 was brownish and compact, while Layer-4 mainly composed of burnt brownish-red soil had a lot of charcoal.

Apart from few potsherds, a notable discovery was a copper coin of Śrī Sāmanta Deva (dia. 1.8cm; thick. 0.1cm) with a prancing lion on the reverse and elephant on the obverse<sup>13</sup>. It was found 2m below the surface close to the west of wall no.2.

#### viii. Trench H-V

Layer-1 of Trench H-V was composed of humus and fallen masonry stones, while Layer-2 was ashy, and Layer-3 was brownish. Wall no. 2 of Trench H-VI was traced as wall no.1 of Trench H-V. It extended for 4.1m in the south whereupon wall no. 2 of H-V joined it at right angle and stretched eastward for 4.25m. Wall no. 3 was exposed parallel at 2m from wall no. 1 and joined wall no. 2 at right angle on its north.

A squarish niche — 40cm wide, 38cm high and 29cm deep, was found on the eastern face of wall no. 3 at 40cm from its joint corner with walls no. 2 and 38cm below the datum line (Fig. 19). A drain no. 1 came out under wall no. 2 at 26cm to the east of wall no. 3. A stone-paved floor was found to the west of wall no. 3 below 2.47m the datum line. Drain no. 2—18cm wide and 28cm deep, came out under wall no. 3 at 45cm to the north from the joint corner of walls no. 2 and 3. A hearth, few potsherds, a broken panel, and a statue were found at this trench.

### ix. Trench H-IV

Layer-1 of Trench H-IV was a mixture of humus and fallen masonry stones. Wall no.1, 76cm thick and 55cm below the datum line, was the eastern extension of wall no.2 of H-V. On its eastern end, it joined at right angle wall no.2 of the trench that extended in the north-south direction. Wall no.2 was 1.48m thick and had traces of lime plaster on its outer or eastern face. Both these walls were of fine diaper masonry.

A circular structure of ashlar masonry which was 2.3m in diameter was found 59cm below the datum line. It was situated to the south of wall no.1 and 1.65m from the joint corner of walls no.1 and 2. A relief panel showing a kneeling figure before the Buddha, a harmika, two fragments of a sculpture, few potsherds and iron nails were found near it. This was, probably, the remains of a round stupa, the only one of its kind found at the site (Fig. 9).

In the end balks between the trenches were removed for plotting structural remains. The excavation was concluded, and all the trenches were refilled as per contract with the landowner.

## Structural Remains

Detailed archaeological history of the site could not be developed from the debris, because it was completely pillaged by illegal diggers in the past. However, what could be retrieved from the leftover wreckages and structural remains of different periods is presented here.

### a. Stupa Precinct

The perceived 'Stupa Precinct' seemed bounded by a perimeter wall as suggested by its exposed segments in trenches H-IV and H-VI. The round stupa built on a circular base of diaper masonry survived with 37cm high three courses of the drum (Fig. 9). The presumed perimeter wall indicated that probably it was a shrine. Around the stupa fragments of plain and decorated schist stone were picked up. Broken pieces of a large umbrella in the

nearby Trench G-IV support our assumption that this round stupa was probably a significant structure on the site.

### b. Minor Stupas

To the west of the shrine, remains of several minor stupas were exposed in Trenches G-IV and F-IV (Fig. 10). Most of the stupas were built in ashlar masonry and lime plastered. Fragments of schist sculptures scattered around them were, probably discarded by robbers. Minor stupas no. 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14 and 15 were exposed in Trench F-IV, while the remaining no. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 in Trench G-IV. None of them survived above their square bases (Figs. 11-12).

### c. Chapel-like Structures

Rectangular structures no. 9, 10 and 11—facing to the west on a solid base/platform, mistakenly noted as 'votive stupas', were correctly termed as 'chapels' by Prof. Abdur Rahman. The platforms built in diaper masonry had traces of lime plaster (Figs. 13, 14). Chapels no. 9 and 11 were exposed in F-IV, while no.10 in Trench F-V. Presumably, they were meant for enshrining a stupa model, an image or an emblem for worship or a ritual, or they were used for meditation. These structures can be compared with cells no. 1 and 2 excavated at the Shnaisha site in District Swat which were meant for keeping images for veneration.

## Excavated Material

Besides objects carved in schist or modelled in stucco, mostly plain and rarely painted potsherds of medium texture, terracotta beads and figurines, grinding stones, flat round cooking stones, iron nails, a copper bowl, and animal bones and teeth were found during the excavation. All the antiquity was initially housed in the nearby Dir Museum. Being a joint project, both the institutions mutually divided the antiquity in the presence of Prof. Farid Khan (then the Chairman) and Prof. Abdur Rahman from the Department, and Mr. Aurangzeb Khan (then the Director of the Dir Museum) on closure of the excavation. Since

then, their respective share is held in the custody of the University and the Dir Museums.

The Accession Register of the University Museum has recorded 72 objects from the Maṭkanai site. Apart from three granite river-ground pebbles used as pestles and two stucco heads, the remaining objects are made in black and green schist stone. Whereas the Accession Register of the Dir Museum documented 134 objects (from acc. no. DMC-1998 to DMC-2132) from the same site. The principle author verified all the objects in the reserve collection of both the museums from the Antiquity Register, prepared on the site. The sculptures recorded in the Accession Register of the Dir Museum from Acc. No. DMC-1998 to DMC-2042 (except for 2031 and 2040) were physically verified. A copper bowl bearing acc. no. DMC-2126 was also excavated from here. The provenance of a sculpture with acc. no. DMC-2007 was wrongly associated with the other simultaneously excavated nearby site, Baghrajai. However, the said sculpture belongs to the Maṭkanai site, as verified from its Antiquity Register. Only 43 objects are correctly entered in the Accession Register of the Dir Museum, while some sculptures from other sites are wrongly recorded from the Maṭkanai site. The authorized staff of the Dir Museum was duly informed and requested to cross check it with the Antiquity Register.

The principle author also discovered that 22 unknown objects lying in the reserve collection of the Dir Museum belong to the Maṭkanai site that were physically verified from the Antiquity Register. The number of objects from the site in the Museum, therefore, rose from 43 to 65. Except for the copper bowl and four stucco sculptures, all the remaining objects are carved in schist stone. It was noticed that two panels bearing acc. nos. DMC-2009 and DMC-2033 were two broken pieces of the same panel. Two other pieces with acc. nos. DMC-2006 and DMC-2027 also belonged to a single panel. In both the cases, the broken pieces were joined together which brought the number of antiquities down to 63 instead of 65. Consequently, out of total 135 documented objects from the site 72 are lying in the University Museum and 63 in the Dir Museum. The reserve

collection of the latter museum, in our opinion, needs revisiting for physical verification from the Antiquity Register.

The sculptures from Maṭkanai include various reliefs depicting a *jātaka*, scenes from the life of the Buddha, images of the Buddha and Bodhisattva, devotees, other humans, mythical beings, birds, animals, architectural elements, and miscellaneous objects (Figs. 21-57).

The only *jātaka* found in the collection is the *Dipamkara Jātaka* (Fig. 21)<sup>15</sup>; Relief panels showing important episodes from the life of the Buddha include interpretation of the Queen Māyā's dream, the birth and death scenes of the Buddha; horoscope of Prince Siddhārtha; his birth festival; the gods exhort Siddhārtha to renounce the world; Indra and Brahmā entreat the Buddha to preach; visit of a group of ascetics to the Buddha; offering of food/four bowls to the Buddha; solar disc in front of the Buddha inside a cave; and the death scene or *Mahāparinirvāṇa* of the Buddha (Figs. 22-27).<sup>16, 17</sup>

Besides Bodhisattva figures, sixteen reliefs portray heads and various poses of the Buddha (*abhaya mudrā*, *dhyāna mudrā* and *bhūmiśparśa mudrā*; relief panels depicting devotees standing in *añjālimudrā*, kneeling in prayers, and seated in adoration; and three images of shaven headed monks. Some devotees shown in princely costumes apparently belong to the noble or royal family. Few images of the laity are also depicted in worshipping poses (Figs. 28-36).

There are 55 panels and fragments depicting human figures engaged in secular activities, heads of the princes and common people, and hands and feet broken from reliefs and portrait images. In addition, this category includes images of warriors, musicians, and human figures under arches (Figs. 37-49).

Mythical figures include cupid attached to a *nāgadanta* or a stupa-peg; a fragment of a false gable showing a human head with a serpent hood; a defaced Vajrapāṇi; the upper body-part of a badly damaged Atlas; and a stucco figure with black wash holding an object (*vajra*?) in his right hand.

Fauna represents real or stylized images of

birds or eagle-heads atop the ends of gable arches, winged lions, and four prancing horses in profile. Two broken pieces depict the fore and hind body parts of an elephant, and a bracket showing the rear part of a seated animal (a lion or a monkey).

A variety of architectural elements comprise: a balustrade of vertical and horizontal bars with a coping of carved lanceolate leaves, and stepped merlons atop; two square panels decorated with full-blown lotus flowers probably detachable elements of a square *harmikā*; two fragments of a capital and a base of an Indo-Corinthian pilaster, normally used in relief panels for separating different scenes; and various types brackets—a bracket with a figure of devotee in *añjalimudrā*, winged lion brackets, fragments of an elephant bracket, a bracket with two slots and papyrus scroll end. (Figs. 50-53).

Seven miscellaneous objects include a badly rusted copper bowl, a fragment depicting four floral buds, two oil lamps and three smooth cylindrical pestles (Figs. 54-57). The Site Antiquity Register 1980 records that the copper bowl from Stupa no. 6 contained a small gold disc, a tiny bead, and an ivory disc (?). The bowl is preserved in the Dir Museum, but the said relics could not be trace during our visit.

### Chronological Reconstruction

In the absence of secured archaeological context ruthlessly destroyed by robbers and any other reliable evidence, we have attempted to reconstruct relative chronology of the site mainly on stylistic basis from the survived sculptural and structural remains. The sole coin picked up from the disturbed strata provides an additional but unreliable information.

#### a. Chronological Construction on Sculptural Evidence

The study of the sculptures shows that most of the human figures are carved in the typical Swati style.<sup>18</sup> Facial structure of the Maṭkanai figures tends from oval to round with a high bridged nose and wide chin. Male figures have their thin lips tightly closed bearing large dense wing-shaped drooping moustache. Half or fully opened eyes are with prominent brow

ridges (Figs. 28-30, 35). The figures mostly put on indigenous clothes, shawl and dhoti with deep or incised folds. No rigidity or schematic arrangement is observed in the costumes, they are rather billowing in a natural way (Figs. 21-26, 36-40).

Like that of Gandhāra, Mathurā, Kapisa and Bactria, the Buddhist art of the Swat Valley also reached its maturity under the patronage of the Kushans. Although the cosmopolitan Kushans supported other vassal religions too, yet Buddhism and Buddhist art fully thrived, especially, under Kanishka I (c. 127–150 CE) (Falk 2004:167). Several panels in the present collection show characteristic features of this period. Except for few specimens where stiffness and rigidity and lifelessness are exhibited,<sup>19, 20</sup> all the figures are refined, flexible and show movement. The drapery folds are parallel and billowing freely (Figs. 22, 25).<sup>21</sup> Wavy or curly hair style seems to be most popular (Figs. 28, 30).<sup>22</sup> In addition, the figures are also shown wearing Indian dresses, shawl and dhoti (Figs. 35-36).<sup>23</sup> Blend of Central Asian with Indian costumes can be observed during this phase (Figs. 37-38, 41). A variety of carved headdresses depict the sculptor's ability to conceive ideas from his cultural milieu and mould them into visual iconicity (Figs. 22-24, 29).<sup>24</sup>

Figures shown in European fashion in relief panels were introduced during this period (Fig. 23, 41).<sup>25</sup> Three popular poses of the Buddha present in our collection are, he is shown sitting in reassuring pose (*abhaya mudrā*), meditating pose (*dhyāna mudrā*) and earth touching pose (*bhūmisparśa mudrā*).

Stylistic analysis leads us to assume that the Maṭkanai sculptures were produced during the rule of the Kushans, more precisely, late first century to early third century CE.

Since Gandhāra and Oḍḍiyāna were located on the crossroads of Eurasia, cross-cultural currents enriched its artistic repertory. The Buddhist art of these regions imbibed foreign influences because of mutual socio-cultural and commercial contacts. Resultantly, the



Hellenistic, Roman, Central Asian and Persian cultural influences are boldly observed on the arts of Gandhāra and Oḍḍiyāna. Maṭkanai sculptures are no exception whereon such artistic traits are skillfully mixed with indigenous features.

#### **b. Chronological Construction on Structural Evidence**

The chronological sequence of the Maṭkanai site is based on the following masonry types:

1. Structures of fine diaper masonry
2. Structures of poor diaper masonry, and
3. Structures of ashlar masonry

Chronology of the Buddhist archaeological heritage sites is based on the data retrieved from them. Numismatic evidence and other scientific dating methods from secure archaeological context are major sources of absolute chronology, while typological or stylistic analyses of sculptural and structural remains or correlation of other artefacts are additional sources for relative dating. In this regard, Sir John Marshall (1960, 2006) established an architectural chronology of some of the sites at Taxila based on variation of masonry types in accordance with numismatic evidence. He recognised four distinct types of masonry: rubble, diaper, semi-ashlar, and ashlar. This relative sequence of masonry types can be confidently applied, at least, to 15 sites he excavated between 1912 and 1937. This sequence is demonstrated by superimposed masonry structures, preserved at many of his excavated sites.

Similarly, Kurt Behrendt (2004, 2018) has recently put forward a relative chronology based on the structural typologies of various Buddhist sites in the vales of Taxila, Gandhāra and Oḍḍiyāna. He proposed four chronological phases based on masonry types:

Periodization of the Maṭkanai site is also constructed here on the Kurt Behrendt model, which places the three constructional phases at the site between phase-II and early phase-III of the given model (i.e., late first and early third centuries CE).

A copper coin of the Hindu Shāhi ruler Śrī Sāmanta Deva of the ninth century CE, excavated from disturbed Layer-1 of H-VI, is dubious. Being an uncertain solitary find from insecure context, therefore, it is not safe and reliable evidence to propose chronology.

Stylistic analysis of the sculptural and typology of structural remains, thus, propose dates for the cultural phases of the Maṭkanai site between the reign of Vima Taktu (c. 85-110 CE) and Vāsudeva-I (c.194-226 CE).

#### **Conclusion**

The Maṭkanai site was excavated under the salvage operation with the intention to save the site and cultural material from illicit digging. Although the objective was not fully achieved, yet the operation helped in retrieving trivial and adversely mutated leftover archaeological data. Due to certain limitations, excavation could not be extended to reconstruct a complete profile of the monastic life at the site. Otherwise, it would have been an authentic source-information for the area concerned.

The corpus of sculptural finds from the site consisted of broken and abraded relief panels as well as statues wrought in black and green schist stone. A few sculptures were made in stucco, and some of them were black washed to give them feel of schist stone. The principle author has given a complete catalogue of the sculptures from the site in her MPhil thesis (Bibi 2020), wherein every sculpture is properly described and documented with the help of the Antiquity and Accession

Phase-I	c.200 BCE to Late 1st Century CE	Rubble Masonry
Phase-II	Late 1st Century to 200 CE	Diaper Masonry
Phase-III	Early and Late c.200 to Mid-5th Century CE	Semi-Ashlar Masonry
Phase-IV	Mid-5th Century to 8th Century CE	Variable

Registers of the University and Dir Museums.

### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Director, Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, for granting the permission to study and photograph sculptures from the Maṭkanai site kept in the Dir Museum. We are thankful to the authorities and staff of the University Museum for their assistance in taking pictures of the Maṭkanai sculptures in their collection. We extend our gratitude to Prof. Ibrahim Shah, Chairman of the Department, for giving access to the archival record. We are also grateful to Mr. Aurangzeb Khan, former Director of the Dir Museum, for sharing his views on excavation of the site. We acknowledge the help of Mr. Asim Amin in computerising the site drawings in addition to taking photographs of the cultural material lying preserved in the University Museum, contained in this report. We owe our debt of gratitude to Prof. Luca Maria Olivieri who provided map of the Buddhist sites of the Swat Valley, excavated during 1980s and 1990s. We are also grateful to the former Deputy Commissioner of District Malakand, Mr. Rehan Khattak, for providing map of the Maṭkanai Village Council. We extend our thanks to all staff members of both the Museums for their wholehearted help and cooperation.

### Notes

1. By K. Kriz and D. Nell, modified by L.M. Olivieri, Courtesy ISMEO-Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan/ University of Vienna- Department of Geography and Regional Research.
2. Swati 1996.
3. Bibi 2020.
4. Swati 1996: 13.
5. Beal 1906, I: 119, note 1.
6. Swati, (1997b), p. 153.
7. The spring gushed out of a small cavern in the nearby foothill where a serpent lived in, and the spring became locally known as Mār Cheena.
8. Field notes of Prof. Abdur Rahman.
9. These readings were taken with GPS when the site was revisited on 13th July 2002 by Prof. Muhammad Farooq Swati and Mr. Muhammad Naeem, surveyor of the Department.
10. The word Maṭkanai is combination of two words, 'maṭ' in local language means 'arm', 'hand' 'flank' or 'border', while 'kaṇ or kiṇ' means 'left'. The word may thus mean 'a village or place located on the left bank of the river. According to Prof. Abdur Rahman, Maṭkanai is the combination of two words, 'matta' and 'kanai'. *Matta* in the local language is used for a good quality of soil, i.e., '*matta khawra*' while '*kanai*' or '*kanay*' means rock or stone. So, literally Maṭkanai means soil and stone. It might be because there are houses made up of stones and mud mortar or the place has a good quality of soil, i.e., '*matta khawra*' and stones or rocks everywhere. According to Mr. Aurangzeb Khan, 'Maṭkanai' is the combination of two words, 'matta' and 'Kanai' which means soil and digging respectively. 'Kanai' is derived from '*kanastal*' which means to dig. So literally this would mean to dig soil or to dig '*matta soil*'. Still another version is, '*matta*' means pure humus free soil and '*kanai*' derived from '*kan*' meaning mine or quarry. *Matkanai*, therefore, means the quarry of pure soil.
11. *Palosa*, plural *paloso*, tree is local name of *Acacia modesta*, family *Leguminosae*. Sheikh 1993: 20.
12. Bibi 2020.
13. Details of this sole coin are retrieved from the antiquity register of 1980 excavation and field notes of Prof. Farooq Swati. We were unable to verify it physically in both collections.
14. cf; Rahman 1993b: 20, Pls. VII-a, VII-b, XXVII-b, XXVIII-a; Taddei 1998: 176-181.

15. cf., Zwalf 1996:134-38, Pls. 127-131; Khan, G.R. 2015:22, Pl. 4; Khan, Z. 2017:131-134, Pls. 1-5; Khan, M.N. 2010a, III: 104, Cat. No. 116.
  16. cf., Ingholt, H. 1957: 54, Pls. no. 20-22; Ali and Qazi, 2008: 65-66, Pls. no. PM\_02734, PM\_00220.
  17. cf. Zwalf 1996: 180, Pl. no. 197; Kurita 2003: 254, Pl. no. 768.
  18. For features of the Swati figures, see Swati, 1996: 245ff.
  19. Bibi 2020: Pls. 13, 28.
  20. Swati 1997a: 11. The reason could be continuation of the archaic style till the end of first century CE.
  21. Bibi 2020: Pls. 3a-c, 8, 11, 45, 49.
  22. Also see Bibi 2020: Pls. 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20.
  23. For details see Bibi 2020: Pls. 4, 6, 8, 11, 34, 35, 38, 39, 45, 49, 50, 61, 64, 68, 69, 76.
  24. cf. Bibi 2020: Pls. 17, 80-86, 93.
  25. cf. Bibi 2020: Pls. 6, 62-64.
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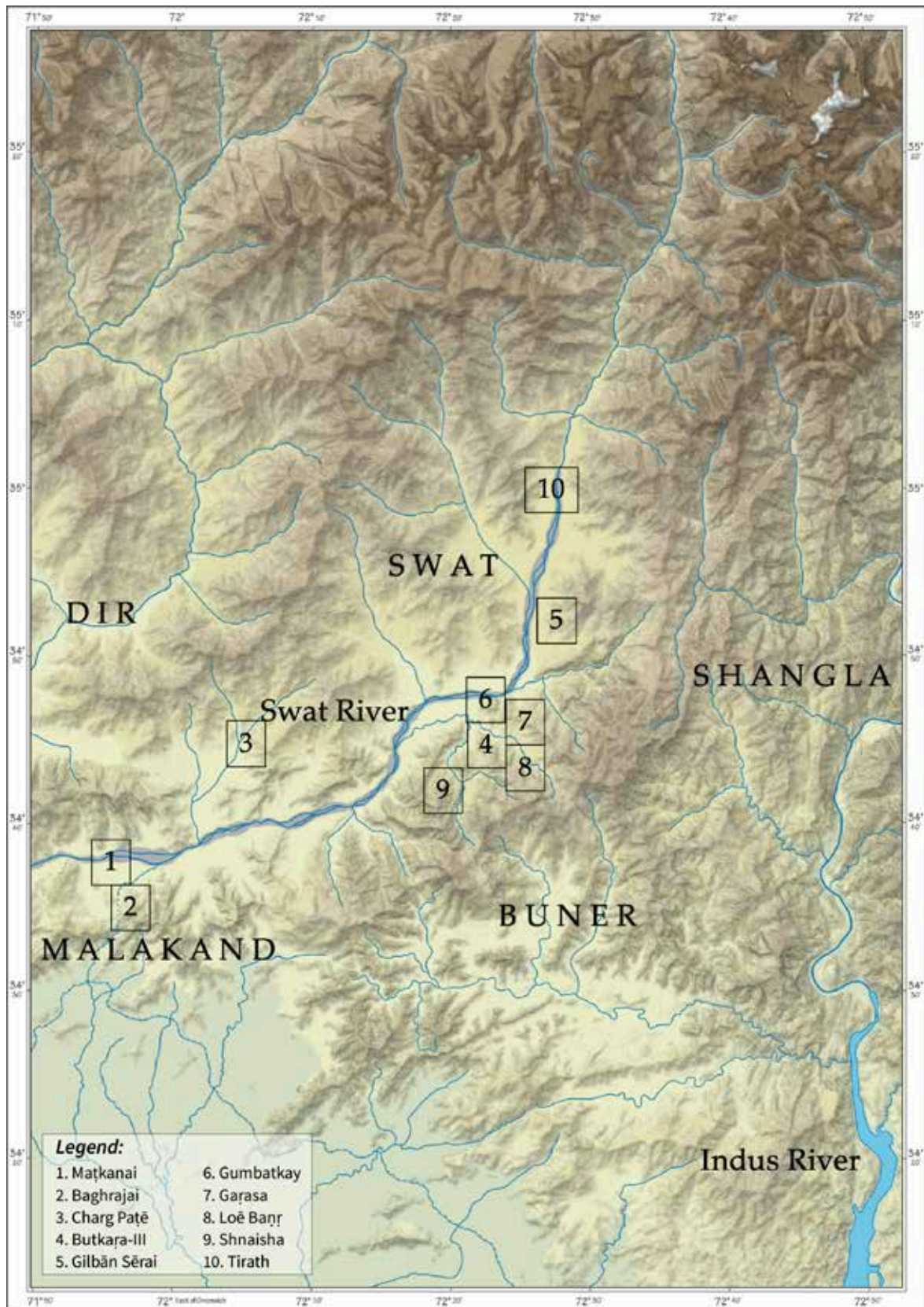


Figure 1. Buddhist sites in the Swat Valley excavated during 1980s and 1990s (Map courtesy: Luca Maria Olivieri)



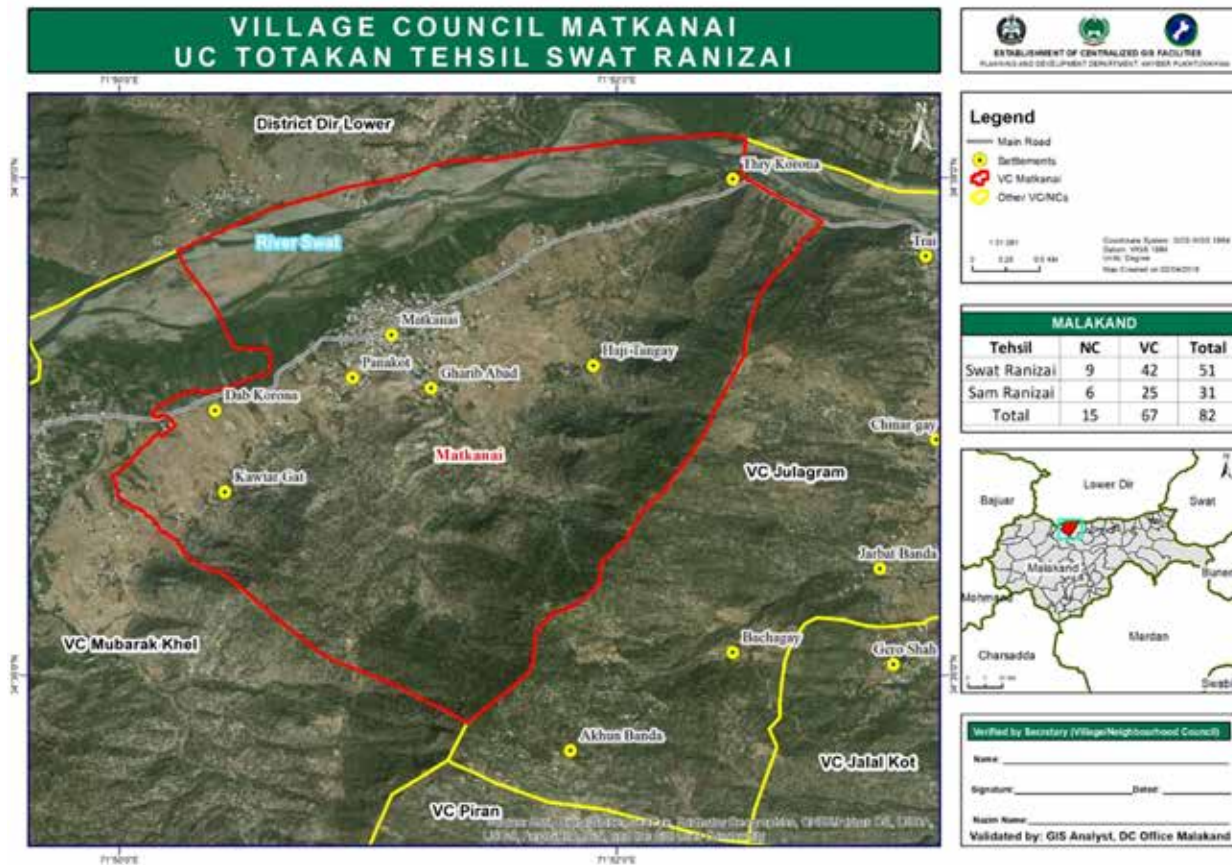


Figure 2. Geographical location of Matkanai village (Map courtesy: Mr. Rehan Khattak, former Deputy Commissioner Malakand)

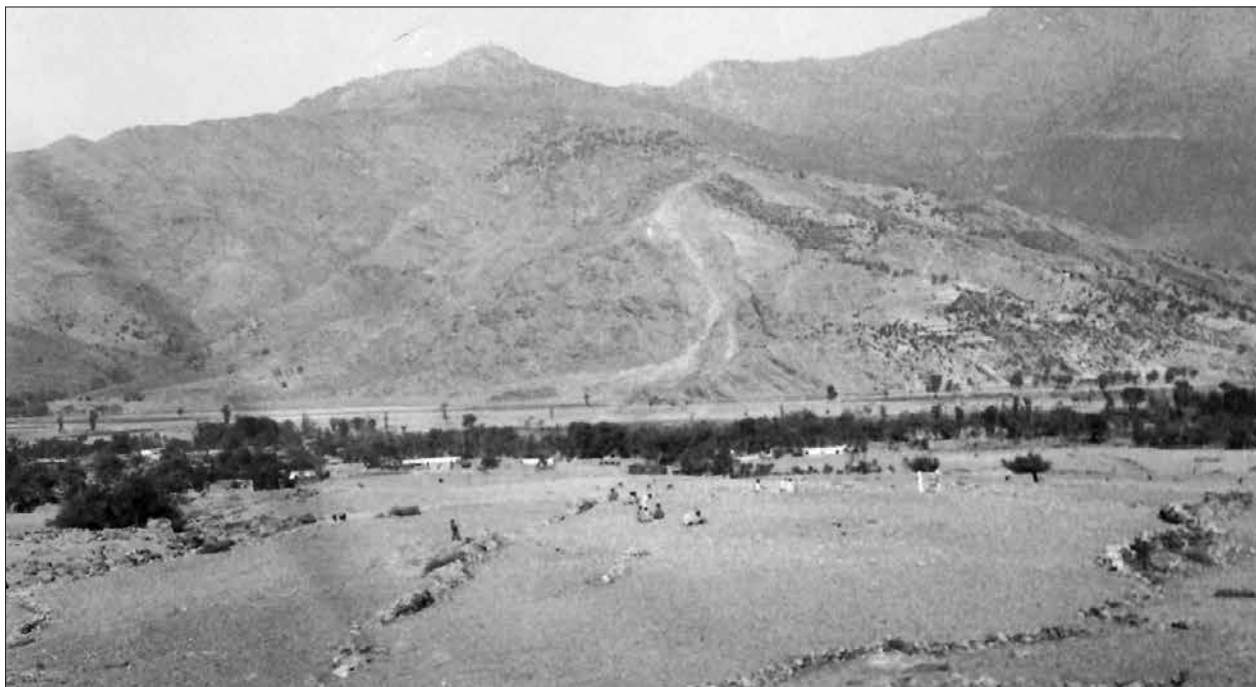


Figure 3. The site of Malak Pate at Matkanai before excavation

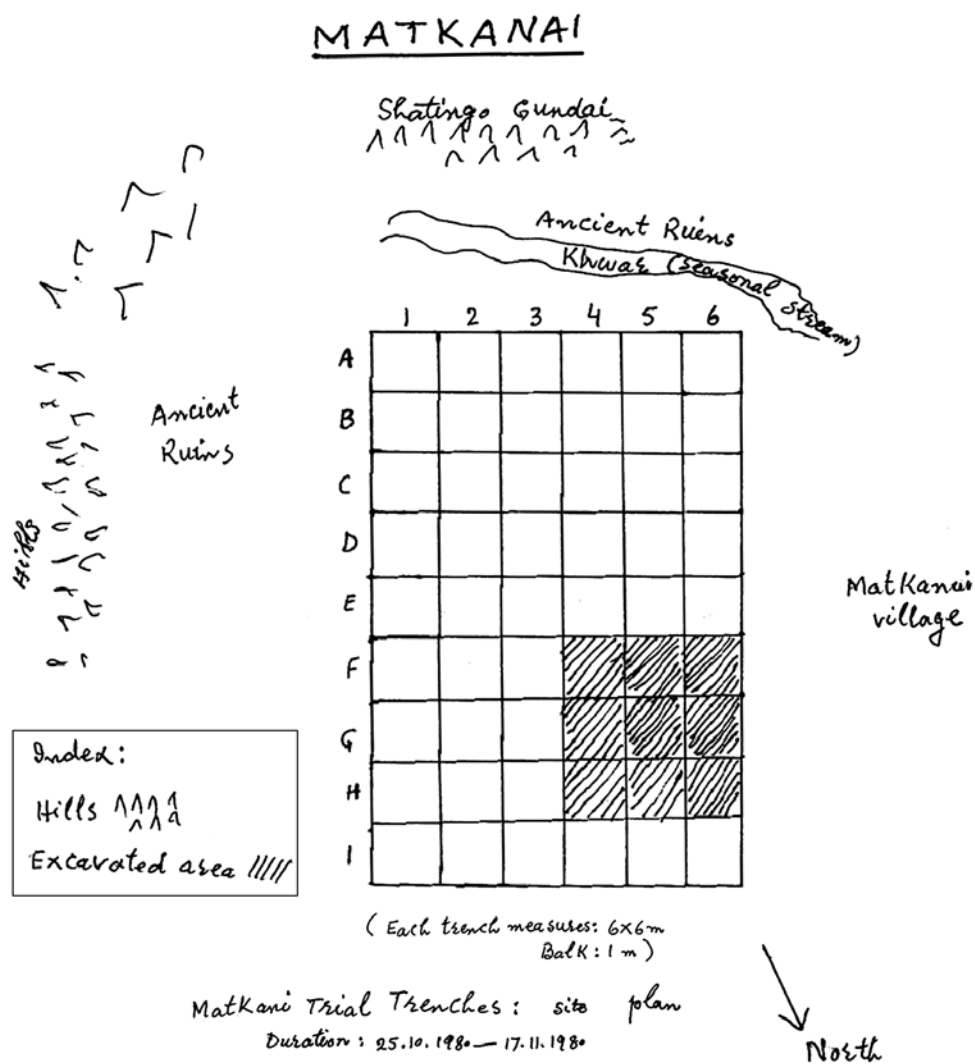


Figure 4. Location of the excavated area (drawn by Prof. Abdur Rahman during 1980 excavation)

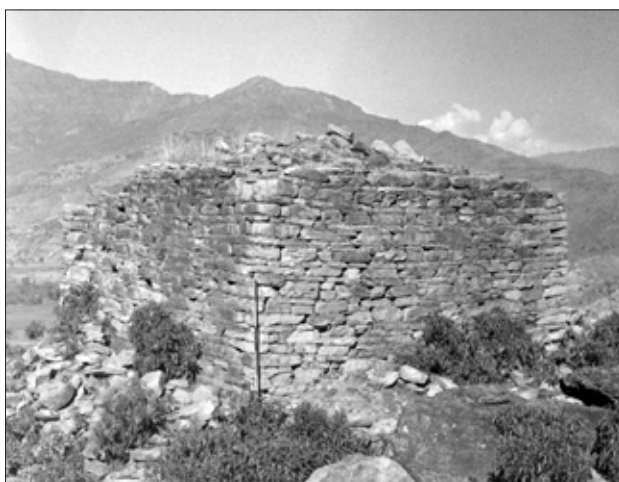


Figure 5. Datum Point



Figure 6. Layout of the trenches

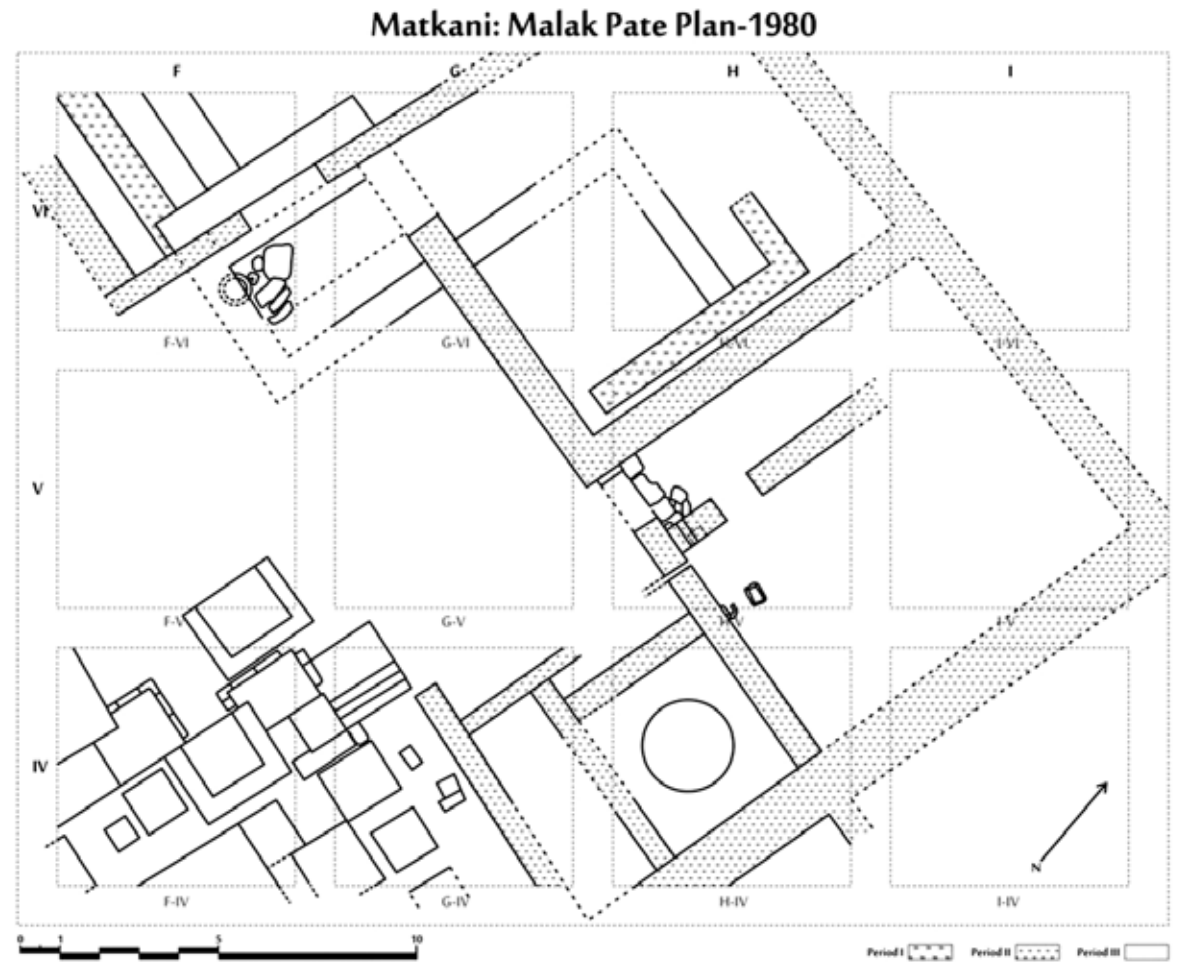


Figure 7. Site Plan of Maṭkanai (1980 excavation)

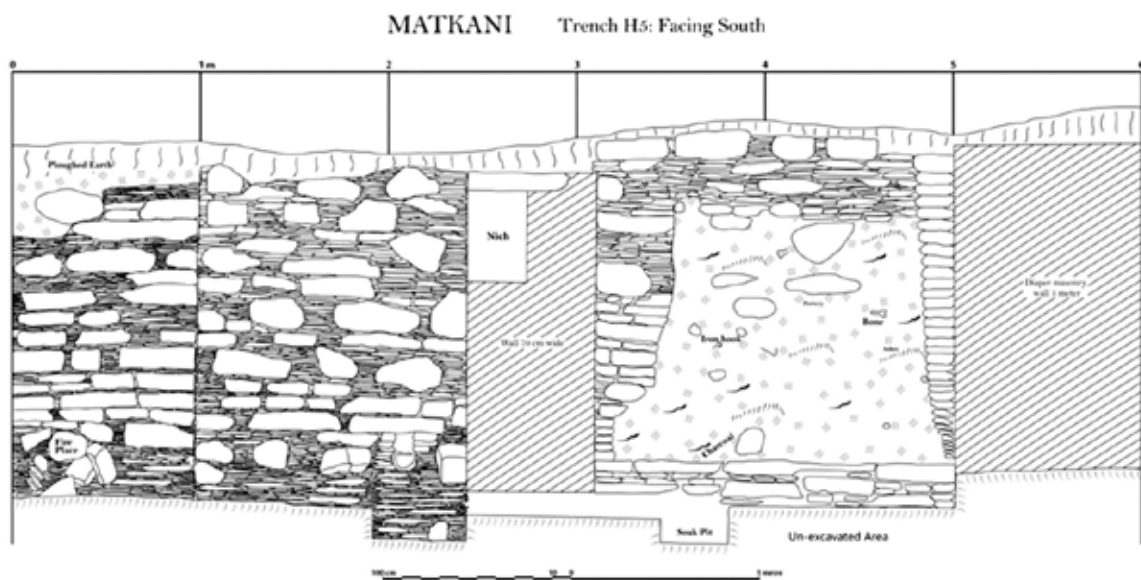


Figure 8. Drawing of Trench H-v





Figure 9. The main stupa or circular stupa



Figure 10. Square Votive stupas



Figure 11. Three images of seated Buddha wrought in stucco between four pilasters of votive stupa no.13



Figure 12. Details of the stucco image of seated Buddha between pilasters of votive stupa no.13



Figure 13. Remains of Chapel-like structures



Figure 14. Lower portion of Chapel no. 10 having five pilasters at regular intervals





Figure 15. Large piece of umbrella exposed at the foundation of wall no. 3, trench F-VI



Figure 16. Broken piece of umbrella and base of a column exposed in trench G-IV



Figure 17. Broken storage jar covered with a lid or dish found *in situ* in trench G-VI



Figure 18. Two headless statues of warriors found in trench G-VI

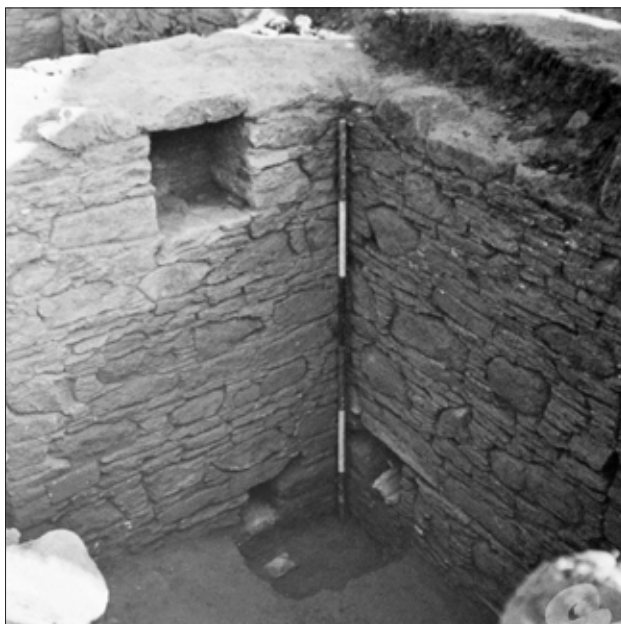


Figure 19. Square lamp-niche in trench H-V



Figure 20. Stratigraphy





Figure 21. Dīpaṃkara Jātaka



Figure 22. Harmikā depicting the birth and death scenes of the Buddha



Figure 23. Horoscope of prince Siddhārtha



Figure 24. Birth festival of prince Siddhārtha





Figure 25. Indra and Brahma entreat the Buddha to preach



Figure 26. Visit of a group of ascetics to the Buddha



Figure 27. Solar disc in front of the Buddha inside a cave



Figure 28. Head of Bodhisattva with rayed halo



Figure 29. Head of Bodhisattva



Figure 30. Head of the Buddha





Figure 31. Buddha in re-assuring pose flanked by worshippers under separate arches



Figure 32. Three Buddhas in *dhyānamudrā* flanked by devotees on either side



Figure 33. Broken panel depicting the Buddha in *bhūmisparśamudrā*





Figure 34. Five devotees or worshippers

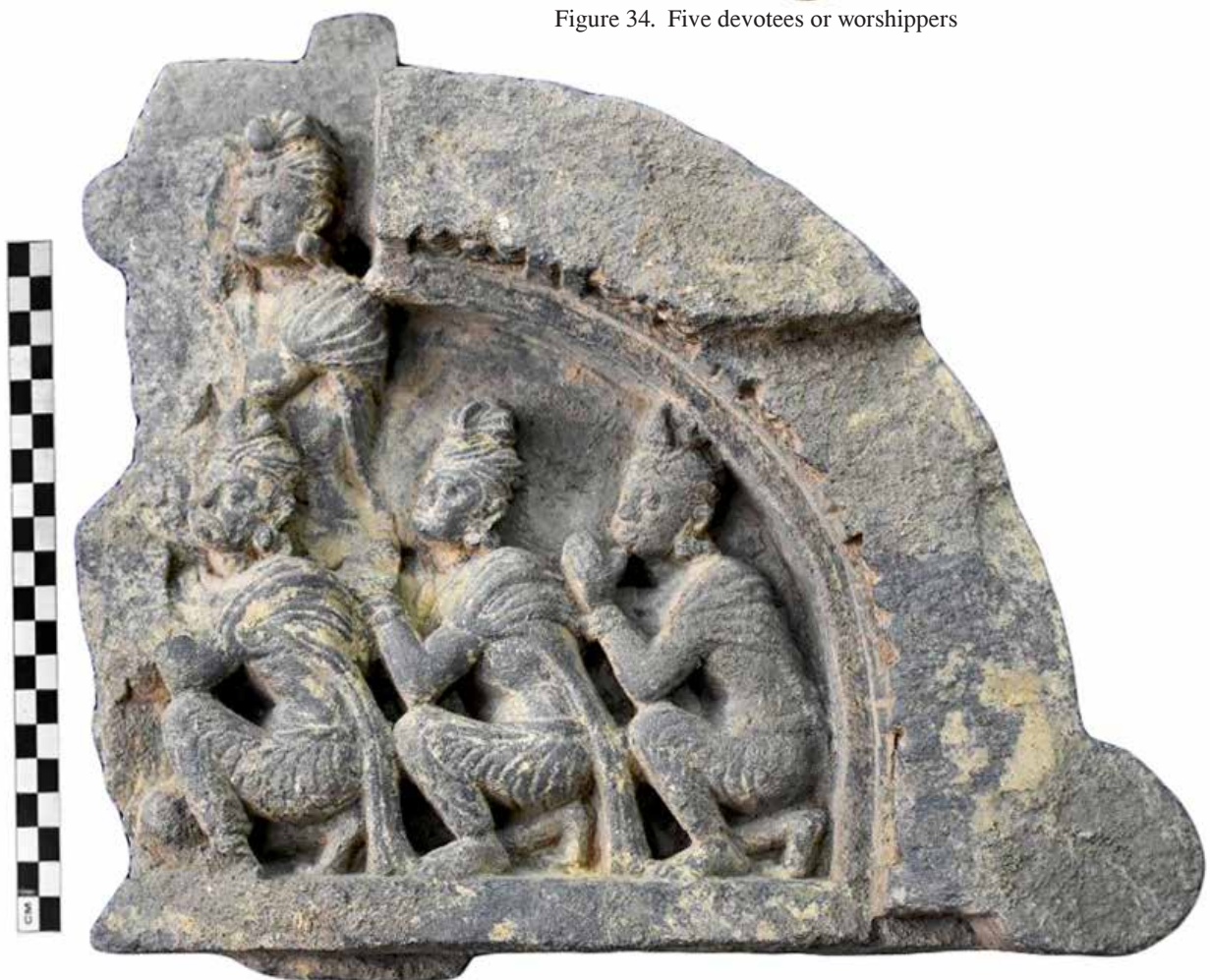


Figure 35. Four kneeling princely worshippers under a false gable arch



Figure 36. A standing devotee with clasped hands



Figure 37. Torso of a warrior with damaged left hand



Figure 38. A warrior



Figure 39. Corner Indo-Corinthian pilaster depicting two musicians



Figure 40. Other side of Fig.38 showing a male and female figure





Figure 41. Human figure seated on a couch



Figure 42. A seated figure with a staff and three standing figures





Figure 43. Two human busts and a turban under separate arches



Figure 44. Two human busts under separate arches



Figure 45. Two standing human figures under chaitya arches



Figure 46. A princely head wearing turban



Figure 47. Turbaned princely head



Figure 48. Clasped human hands



Figure 49. Human legs



Figure 50. A railing and stepped pyramid design





Figure 51. Full-bloomed lotus flower



Figure 52. A slab with floral design



Figure 53. Bracket with slots



Figure 54. Copper bowl



Figure 55. Oil lamp with three internal projections



Figure 56. Pipal leaf shaped oil lamp



Figure 57. Smooth-surfaced cylindrical pestle